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SUBJECT: UNSC: LEBANESE PM FOUAD SINIORA BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON LEBANESE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

¶1. Summary: Before a public meeting of the Security Council April 21, Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora briefed on the Lebanese National Dialogue and delivered a strong message in support of Council actions and the recently released Secretary General's third report on UNSCR 1559. Siniora

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spoke forthrightly about the "heavy-handed interference in Lebanese domestic affairs by the Syrian security establishment." Syria demanded to speak at the meeting, underscoring its continued interference in Lebanese affairs. In a subsequent private meeting with the Council, Siniora made a forceful pitch for a "strong message" from the Council in support of Lebanese independence. End Summary.

¶2. During an April 21 meeting with the Security Council open to the public, Siniora thanked the UNSC and the Secretary-General for "instrumental" support to Lebanon

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during the past 19 months; characterized the third semi-annual UNSCR 1559 compliance report as objective and accurate; and updated the Council on the Lebanese National Dialogue. He noted that the Conference of National Dialogue initiated in March has already achieved significant progress, having reached consensus on relations with Syria, the delimitation of all common borders between Lebanon and Syria, including, first and foremost, the Shebaa Farms area; policy towards Palestinians in Lebanon; and policy on the international investigation and judicial process relating to the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri and his companions. He said that the significance of reaching an agreement on such issues should not be underestimated, that it demonstrated the remarkable resilience of the Lebanese people in the face of systematic attempt to terrorize and intimidate them through bombings and assassinations as well as the progress the Lebanese people have made towards a strong, united, stable country.

Agreements Reached

¶3. Siniora characterized resolution of identity and occupation of Shebaa farms as a priority national issue and requested an "active role" by the UN. He argued that agreeing with Syria on the border that separates Shebaa farms from the Syrian Golan Heights would be an important step towards achieving the full withdrawal of the Israelis from Lebanon in accordance with UNSCR 425. Citing Syrian government statements confirming that Shebaa farms are part of Lebanese territory, Siniora said that his government had approached Syria to begin a demarcation process but was still awaiting a positive response from Syria.

¶4. On Palestinian policy, Siniora said that the National Dialogue had yielded a consensus on implementation of policy

through dialogue, including discussions with the Palestinians to end all armed presence outside refugee camps within 6 months after which discussions would address the issue of weapons and security within the camps. He noted that his government had initiated a major effort to improve the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in cooperation with UNRWA and to work to change living conditions in the refugee camps in association with international community and donors.

Agreements Yet to be Reached

¶15. On the issue of the presidency, Siniora said that a parliamentary majority considered Lahoud's three-year extension in September 2004 to have been the result of Syrian interference and coercion, but because the parliamentary majority is not sufficient to constitutionally shorten Lahoud's extended term, the issue has been referred to the National Dialogue, which will reconvene on April 28. Siniora admitted that reaching agreement would be a challenge.

¶16. Siniora said that the National Dialogue would also consider the issue of Hizbulah's weapons and its role in the defense of Lebanon. He said there is consensus that Hizbulah was the important spear-head of the resistance that led to the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000. Because the Lebanese have concluded that occupied Shebaa farms are Lebanese, the debate is now how to address the future role of Hizbulah's weapons in defending Lebanon. He emphasized the right of the state to have a monopoly over arms and to exercise its full authority throughout the country; he acknowledged that actualizing these rights remains a major challenge.

Relations with Syria, UNIIIC

¶17. Siniora said that putting the Lebanese-Syrian relations

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on the right footing is a major challenge. He said that Syria had played a constructive role in Lebanon and its presence had prevented partition of the country. But the scars left by the dramatic developments of the past 19 months and the heavy-handed interference in Lebanese domestic affairs by the Syrian security establishment for many years would not heal easily. He said that a positive response by Syria on Lebanon's request to establish diplomatic relations and delineate the borders between the two countries, including in the Shebaa farms, would be an indication that the Syrian government is beginning to accept the idea that good relations are possible between Syria and an independent Lebanon.

¶18. Additionally, Siniora reaffirmed Lebanon's strong support for the work of the UNIIIC, said it would strongly support an extension of UNIIIC Chairman Brammerz's term as deemed necessary, and that Lebanon stood willing to work with the UN to establish the tribunal of international character.

Syria Speaks

¶19. Syria requested and was granted permission to speak at the public briefing under Security Council procedural rule 37, inadvertently highlighting its interference in Lebanese affairs. The Syrian representative asserted that Syria had withdrawn from Lebanon in accordance with UNSCR 1559 and rejected the assumption that issues of border demarcation and the exchange of ambassadors with Lebanon fell within UNSCR 1559, arguing these matters are issues of state sovereignty, under which the UN Charter forbids Security Council involvement. Moreover, he said, given the extensive ties between Syria and Lebanon, there was really no need for an exchange of ambassadors; however, it was an issue that could be discussed. As for border demarcation, Syria said that

borders could not be demarcated until Israel withdrew from the Shebaa Farms. He also blamed "certain parties" for spreading rumors and exciting tensions between the two "fraternal" countries.

Closed Consultations

¶10. In the closed consultation that followed the open briefing, Council members generally commended Siniora's efforts, lauded the National Dialogue, and expressed strong support for the range of Council activity on Lebanon. Consistent with the Secretary General's 1559 report, many countries that spoke welcomed the progress that had been achieved on implementation of 1559, but regretted that many of the resolution's requirements remained to be fulfilled. Ambassador Sanders delivered the USG statement, which included a demand for Syria and Iran to end the transfer of arms and weapons to militias in Lebanon.

¶11. The failure of Lebanon and Syria to establish diplomatic relations and demarcate their borders, and the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias were outstanding 1559 issues highlighted by the delegations. On the failure of the two countries to establish diplomatic relations and demarcate their borders, Russia, echoing the Syrian position, asserted that it viewed these issues to be bilateral matters. Siniora effectively rebutted this argument by noting that Syria had failed thus far to provide a "positive response" to Lebanon. The UK also strongly disagreed with the Russian argument. While acknowledging that nothing in the Charter permitted interference in the internal affairs of others, the UK PermRep countered that the Council is certainly "allowed to comment." Moreover, expressing strong skepticism concerning Syrian motives on these issues generally, the UK emphasized that the delimitation of borders and establishment of relations between Syria and Lebanon "depended on the cooperation and goodwill of Syria." Finally, the UK called for Syrian and Iranian compliance with the UNCR 1559 requirement to cease support of militias in Lebanon.

¶12. Qatar's remarks were uneventful, blandly stating that Doha hoped diplomatic and "brotherly contacts" would resume between Syria and Lebanon.

¶13. In response to a French question on whether he expected to visit Damascus, Siniora reported that Damascus had not replied to his request for a visit. In response to a second French question seeking Siniora's assessment of the prospects for restoring full Lebanese sovereignty throughout the country, Siniora renewed his call for UN assistance to restore the Shebaa Farms to Lebanese sovereignty, arguing that once Shebaa was brought under Lebanese authority the

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result would facilitate efforts by the Lebanese government to extend its sole authority over all Lebanese territory. Essentially, Siniora said that resolving the Shebaa Farms issue would remove Hezbollah's basis for remaining armed. After responding to questions, Siniora concluded by making a forceful pitch for a "strong message" from the Council in support of Lebanese independence.

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